

Telephone Interpreting – Best Practices

1. General Rule for telephonic interpreting

When interpreters are not readily available, interpreters may be appointed to serve by telephone for brief, non-evidentiary hearings if the following requirements are met ([GR 11.3](#)):

- (a) [RCW 2.43](#) and [GR 11.2](#) are followed (*note: the Court is still required to appoint certified/registered court interpreters, and the telephonic interpreter must abide by the Code of Professional Responsibility*);
- (b) the equipment used ensures clear communication for all participants;
- (c) attorney-client communications are interpreted confidentially;
- (d) written documents are read aloud for oral translation; and
- (f) an audio recording is made of all statements.

2. Best practices for telephonic interpreting

Before the hearing.

- Book a credentialed (Certified or Registered) court interpreter from [Washington](#) or [another state](#). Interpreting over the phone is much more difficult than in-person interpreting. It is important to appoint an interpreter with extensive court experience to minimize the risk of omissions and misinterpretations.
- Indicate the duration of the assignment – recommended 1 hour minimum for short civil matters and 2 hours minimum for criminal matters. This time helps accommodate delays in calling the case, and time for confidential communication with counsel.
- Provide the interpreter with the background information:
 - Case name and number;
 - Names of the Judge, Prosecuting and Defense attorneys;
 - Copies of documents to be discussed at the hearing, for example, complaint form, arraignment rights, police report;
 - If the interpreter has little or no courtroom experience, discuss with them court protocol, terminology, and acronyms they will likely encounter;
 - If interpreter is not certified or registered by the AOC, provide a copy or link to [GR 11.2](#), the Code of Professional Responsibility for Judiciary Interpreters;
 - Test equipment ahead of time to make sure it is working properly.

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During the hearing.

- Judge: if interpreter is not credentialed refer to the Bench Card to qualify and swear-in the interpreter;
- Give the interpreter explicit permission to interrupt (if parties speak overlapping each other, if the interpreter couldn't hear the statement or if an acronym is not familiar to the interpreter);
- Ensure that everyone:
 - Positions themselves close to the phone or microphone;
 - Identifies themselves before speaking;
 - Pauses for consecutive interpretation to allow interpreting of each statement;
 - Speaks one at a time;
 - States addresses, amounts and names slowly and clearly;
 - Speaks loudly and clearly;
 - Eliminates background noises like whispering and typing – these sounds are often audible to the telephonic interpreter, making it difficult to understand what is being spoken.

After the hearing.

- Check in with the interpreter and courtroom participants to see how things went. This will help you determine whether to appoint the interpreter again and identify what other steps you can take to help prepare a court interpreter for future over-the-phone hearings.

3. Telephonic interpreting companies

Telephonic interpreting companies can be extremely handy, but the interpreters on the line are almost always non-certified or registered in Washington courts. They may have little or no court experience or knowledge of court-specific terminology and procedures.

Interpreters booked through telephonic interpreting companies (for example, Language Line) could be helpful for short customer services conversation. Keep the language as basic as possible, and always comply with [General Rule 11.3](#).